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SUBJECT: AFRICOM'S AMB YATES MEETS WITH BELGIAN MFA AND MOD

Classified By: Charge Wayne Bush for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. AFRICOM's Deputy to the Commander for Civ/Mil Activities (DCMA) Mary Carlin Yates met with the Belgian MOD March 12 and MFA March 13 to share opinions and learn about Belgium's efforts in Africa. Ambassador Yates explained AFRICOM's mission and its holistic approach to supporting U.S. foreign policy in Africa that includes a significant civilian component. Throughout her meetings, Ambassador Yates was looking for areas where AFRICOM could cooperate with the Belgians. The MOD suggested sending a Belgian officer to AFRICOM to work on the Central African Desk; Yates said logistical issues prevented such an exchange in the near term. She also extended an invitation to Belgium to send a military delegation to AFRICOM to share lessons learned on military assistance in Central Africa. The MOD urged closer donor coordination in the DRC, where Belgium had good information. Yates extended an offer to Belgium to participate in the 2010 Africa Partnership Station (ASP), and the MOD said a joint Belgian-Dutch team might be possible though a frigate was unlikely. The MOD also provided a sobering readout of Belgian attempts to train a DRC rapid reaction force when no Congolese support or direction was given the trainees afterward. The soldiers turned to looting after their training. At the MFA, Ambassador Yates received the GOB view on European cooperation in Africa. Only Belgium, France, the UK and Portugal are deeply involved, according to MFA Director General for Multilateral Affairs Regibeau, and setting a policy that deals with competing national interests and on which the other 27 EU member states can agree is challenging. Belgium has found South Africa to be a good partner in central Africa. The MFA shared the MOD's sobering view on Belgian experience training soldiers in the DRC, but was looking for future options that would guarantee post-training DRC support to trainees. Belgium remains critical and unenthusiastic about the DRC - Rwanda cooperation against the FDLR. The GOB believes military action alone cannot solve the long term issues of peace and stability in central Africa; deeper regional cooperation is necessary. End Summary.

MOD Meeting

¶2. On March 12, Ambassador Yates met with Divisional Admiral Marc Ectors, Director of Operations and Training at the Cabinet of the Minister of Defense and Vincent Mertens de

Wilmars, Diplomatic Advisor to Minister of Defense De Crem. Ectors and Yates agreed that greater cooperation between the United States and Belgium deserved further consideration, as discussed by Secretary Clinton and Minister of Foreign Affairs De Gucht in their recent meeting. Ectors suggested that Belgium would be interested in sending an embedded officer to AFRICOM to work on the Central African Desk. Yates described some logistical obstacles to such an officer's presence in Stuttgart in the near term and the Command's decision to integrate several African military reps first, but thanked Ectors for the offer for future consideration.

¶3. Ectors said Belgium has experience in Africa that could be valuable for AFRICOM as it develops its operations on the continent. Belgium maintains good information sources in the Congo in particular. He mentioned Belgium's experience with training a Congolese battalion and sustaining of Benin's MONUC battalion. One lesson is that coordination among donors is important because African governments will often try to split donors apart and try to get as much from them as they can. It is better to consult and then take a coordinated set of proposals to the governments.

¶4. Yates invited the Belgians to participate in the Africa Partnership Station in 2010, with a goal of including a Belgian ship in the operation. Ectors observed that the Belgian and Netherlands navies are integrated and so they might participate together. Sending a ship would be difficult, he said, because Belgium has only two frigates and they are involved in other operations. Ambassador Yates also

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extended an invitation for a Belgian military delegation to visit AFRICOM in Stuttgart to share with AFRICOM officers lessons learned from Belgian military assistance efforts in Africa.

¶5. De Wilmars and Ectors said that there have been some problems with Belgium's training of a Congolese rapid reaction force. The first group of trainees is now graduating, but Belgium is concerned that they cannot be put into the field alone. It would delay training a second group if Belgian trainers must remain engaged with the first group. The soldiers are ill-paid and ill-fed, and Belgium was unable to train them to the level desired, Ectors said. Asked by Yates if Belgium provides human rights training to the Congolese troops, Ectors said that the problem is larger than simply lack of training. The Congo does not have a good corps of non-commissioned officers and military justice is weak, he said. Moreover, soldiers need to be educated and their leaders need to be deterred from taking the soldiers' pay.

MFA Meetings

How Belgium works with Partners in Central Africa

¶6. (C) Ambassador Yates and Charge Bush met March 13 at the MFA with Jean-Arthur Regibeau, Director General for Multilateral Affairs, Jean-Luc Bodson from the Minister's Cabinet, Guy Trouveroy, Director for Africa, and Paul Surst of Political Military Affairs. The MFA said Europeans broadly share views on security approaches in Africa, which is a focus for European foreign and security policy. The translation of the broad view into action is more difficult. In the Belgian view, Europe is not doing enough and could do more. Part of the challenge according to the MFA is varied approaches and interests. When Europeans talk about options, national policies often interfere and rarely produce an overall EU policy. The GOB is cognizant of its limited financial resources and tries to leverage its great deal of knowledge and experience in Central Africa. Belgium tries work with EU partners of greater means, but few of the EU 27 are interested. Belgium, France, the UK, and Portugal are

the countries who are deeply engaged in Africa. Poland and Sweden are supportive of European missions for humanitarian and EU reasons respectively.

17. (C) The GOB considers the DRC quite capable of playing European and African partners against each other. Trouveroy said many northern European countries dismiss Belgium as a former colonialist power seeking another opportunity for financial gain. Most of them (except Sweden) will talk about NGOs but not support security operations. The MFA expressed particular dismay with German unwillingness to lead in conflict zones. Trouveroy characterized Germany as having extraordinary power not being used. The Germans were adamantly opposed to the Belgian-proposed bridging force. The Germans have an embassy in every African country, but either do not see what is happening or refuse to react to the situation in African countries. Trouveroy attributed Germany's reticence to historical factors. Regibeau interjected that Belgium is not colonialist anymore, but is often accused of being so, especially by South Africa. Belgium has worked with South Africa as a partner in the DRC and Burundi. Trouveroy said the South Africans, though prickly on occasion, understand that engagement in central Africa is for the long term. Ambassador Yates asked about Japan and Angola. The MFA said the Japanese visited Brussels to learn more about central Africa, but have not so far become partners on the ground. The Angolans have trained police, but they are Portuguese speaking. Trouveroy underscored that trainers in the Congo must speak French.

Military Cooperation in Africa

18. (C) The MFA provided similar analysis to the MOD's. Belgium trained DRC soldiers as part of security sector reform (SSR), but the soldiers received no direction or

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support from DRC leadership afterwards. Though the training may have been successful, the well trained battalions unraveled without logistics, food, or housing. Rather, they fled and pillaged the countryside. In addition they are always hampered by the cultural practice of bringing their families with them on deployments. Belgium participated in a European Security Sector Reform Mission (EUSEC) program to ensure pay reached soldiers. However, the cost of the program's expatriate staff and other measures are greater than the amounts of the actual salaries paid to the affected soldiers. Trouveroy said an MOD team was in Kinshasa looking at new options for assistance, and whether it is possible to maintain organizational levels and ensure soldiers receive pay, as well as logistical support issues. He noted the International Crisis Group's approach to working with regional reform of the DRC armed forces, and opined that barrack and unit reform might be the solution if the central headquarters command is not open to reform. Bodson said MinDef De Crem promised training and support to Burundi on a recent visit. He suggested international donors should agree to an SSR plan now that the peace process is coming to a close and the FNL is joining the political process. Several Belgians stressed the importance of a cadre of non-commissioned officers.

19. (C) The MFA proudly spoke about Belgium's peacekeeper training work in Benin. Bodson characterized the Benin relationship as good military cooperation because Benin has a degree of military organization and hierarchy. Belgium continues to provide logistics and support to the Beninese peacekeepers who are now deployed in MONUC and the Ivory Coast. Belgium has been so pleased with the Beninese case that they consider it a possible model for African ownership. Belgium has spent small amounts with great success in the Central African Republic. Belgium has stationed an officer in the CAR as an advisor, has assisted in talks between rebels and the government, and supported the CAR's participation on the UN Peace Building Commission.

Rwanda - DRC Cooperation

¶10. (C) Charge Bush asked about the DRC - Rwanda cooperation against the FDLR. The MFA was careful in its response, and said Belgium was in support of a rapprochement between the two countries that led to an improvement in diplomatic ties and broad regional cooperation. Belgium cannot say it was against the FDLR operation, but it was less than enthusiastic. Belgium does not view Rwandan troops on DRC soil as a positive precedent. The FDLR has retreated into the forest, and the MFA is concerned they may emerge to exact retribution. The GOB would like to see the governments cooperate on a nonmilitary level, as military solutions alone cannot bring peace and security to the eastern DRC.

Comment

¶11. (C) Ambassador Yates received good briefings from the Belgian MFA and MOD. The MFA identified areas where Belgium is considering options in the Congo on SSR and other efforts to promote peace and stability. They also highlighted what Belgium considers models for security cooperation, training soldiers in Benin and Belgium's work in the CAR. Based on the extensive discussions with Belgian military, diplomats, NGOs and private sector experts during Ambassador Yates' visit, it is clear that the Belgians have a better understanding of AFRICOM's role on the continent, and are eager for greater cooperation on Africa between Belgium and the United States.

BUSH

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